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WOLVERINE and the X-MEN
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If you were born different with mutant super-powers, the Jean Grey School for Higher Learning is the school for you. Founded by Wolverine and staffed by experienced X-Men, you will learn everything you need to know to survive in a world that hates and fears you.

WOLVERINE and the X-MEN

WOLVERINE
Clawed Headmaster

KITTY PRYDE
Phasing Headmistress

ICEMAN
Ice-Controlling Teacher

BEAST
Animalistic, Intellectual Vice-Principal

RACHEL GREY
Telekinetic, Telepathic Teacher

IDIE OKONKWO
Temperature-Controlling Student

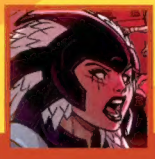
BROO
Alien Student

QUENTIN QUIRE
Telepathic Student

GENESIS
Flying, Eye-Blasting Student

ANGEL
Metal-Winged Student

KID GLADIATOR
Superstrong Alien Student



WARBIRD
Shi'ar Bodyguard

PREVIOUSLY

THE COSMIC PHOENIX FORCE HAS RETURNED, AND THE X-MEN HAVE EMBRACED IT WITH OPEN ARMS. THE ALL-POWERFUL ENTITY HAS BEEN SPLIT BETWEEN FIVE HOSTS: CYCLOPS, EMMA FROST, NAMOR, COLOSSUS, AND MAGIK. NOW THE MOST POWERFUL HEROES ON THE PLANET, THE PHOENIX FIVE HAVE SET ABOUT EXTENDING THEIR UTOPIA TO THE ENTIRE WORLD, SEEKING TO FIX ALL THE WORLD'S ILLS. BUT THIS NEW WORLD IS NOT WELCOMING TO ALL--THE AVENGERS, WHO SOUGHT TO STOP THE PHOENIX, HAVE BEEN NAMED OUTLAWS, AND THE X-MEN HUNT THEM ACROSS THE GLOBE.

WOLVERINE, HEADMASTER OF THE JEAN GREY SCHOOL, HAS SIDED WITH THE AVENGERS AND REMAINS ON THE RUN WITH THEM. MUCH TO HIS CHAGRIN, MANY OF HIS FACULTY MEMBERS—ICEMAN, RACHEL GREY, AND ANGEL, AMONG OTHERS—HAVE JOINED UP WITH CYCLOPS AND HIS FOLLOWERS. THE STUDENTS AT THE SCHOOL HAVE BEEN FORBIDDEN TO JOIN IN THE FIGHTING...BUT KID GLADIATOR REFUSED TO LET THAT STOP HIM AND HAS FOUGHT THE AVENGERS ALONGSIDE THE PHOENIX-POWERED MUTANTS. AS A RESULT, THE X-MEN NOW HAVE A NEW THREAT TO DEAL WITH: GLADIATOR, EMPEROR OF THE ALIEN SHI'AR EMPIRE AND KID GLADIATOR'S FATHER. ALONG WITH HIS SON'S BODYGUARD, IMPERIAL WARRIOR WARBIRD, LORD GLADIATOR HAS COME TO EARTH TO RETRIEVE HIS SON, WANTING TO TAKE HIM AS FAR AWAY FROM THE VOLATILE PHOENIX AS POSSIBLE.

BORN WARBIRD

JASON AARON
writer

NICK BRADSHAW
penciler

WALDEN WONG, CAM SMITH & NICK BRADSHAW
inkers

GURU EFX
colorist

CHRIS ELIOPOULOS
letterer

NICK BRADSHAW & JUSTIN PONSOR
cover artists

JORDAN D. WHITE
assistant editor

DANIEL KETCHUM
associate editor

NICK LOWE
editor

AXEL ALONSO
editor in chief

JOE QUESADA
chief creative officer

DAN BUCKLEY
publisher

ALAN FINE
executive producer

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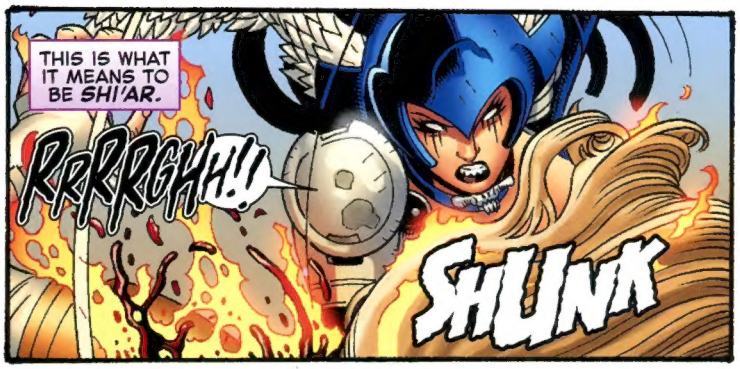
ALL RIGHT, CADET...
THIRTEEN YEARS AGO.
LOOK AT THIS AND TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE.
A VANZZARIAN TUSK HOUND.
WITH ITS SKULL SPLIT OPEN.
AND *THIS* ONE?
TWO SHI'AR WARRIORS, DISEMBOWELING ONE ANOTHER IN AN HONORABLE FASHION.
WELL DONE, CADET.
THANK YOU, MAGISTRATE.
NOW TELL ME...WHAT DO YOU WANT *MOST* IN LIFE?
TO LIVE IN THE SHI'AR WAY.
TO KILL AND DIE IN SERVICE TO THE IMPERIUM.
TO BE A *WARBIRD*, SIR.

"TO BE THE GREATEST WARBIRD WHO EVER LIVED."

DEATH TO THE ENEMIES OF THE SHI'AR!

NOW.

WARSHIPS EXPLODING ALL AROUND ME. THE AIR FILLED WITH PHOENIX FIRE. COLD STEEL IN MY HAND. WAR IN MY HEART.


THIS IS WHAT IT MEANS TO BE SHI'AR.
RRRRGHH!
SHUNK

A SWORD? SERIOUSLY?
YOU STUPID BLOODY BIRD-WOMAN. YOU CAN'T KILL A PHOENIX WITH A SWORD.

DEPENDS ON THE SWORD.
BEEP BEEP BEEEEEEP
OH YOU--

BOOOOOM

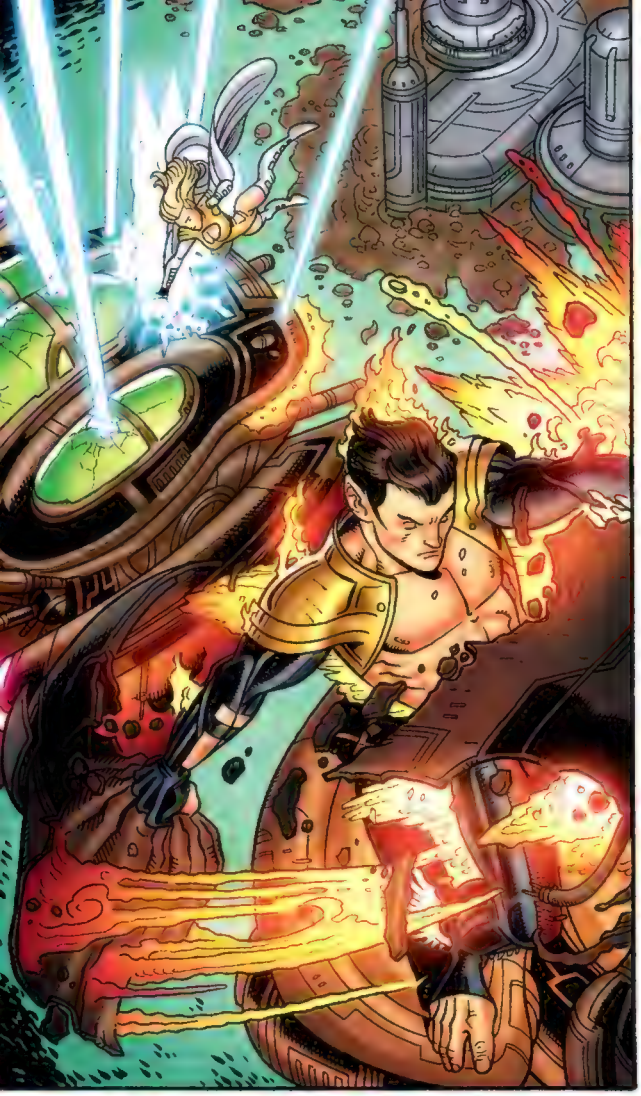
DISENGAGE, WARBIRD. REMEMBER THE PLAN.
MY LORD GLADIATOR, WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, WE MUST PRESS THE ATTACK. HAVE THE WARSHIPS LAUNCH FUSION MINES AND GEOLOGICAL DESTABILIZERS. SEND IN THE SUBATOMIC SUPERGUARDIANS AND THE TELEPATHIC SNIPER SQUAD.
WE MUST HIT THEM WITH EVERYTHING WE'VE GOT, SIR, IF WE'RE TO HAVE ANY HOPE OF--
DID YOU FORGET WHY WE'RE HERE?
WHERE IS SHE?! WHERE IS THAT BLASTED PEACOCK!?
I'LL TURN HER BRAIN TO PUDDING!
MY EMPEROR, PLEASE, YOU MUST LET ME--
I'LL HANDLE THE X-MEN, WARBIRD.
YOU JUST FIND MY SON.
YES, MY LORD MAJESTOR.
MY NAME IS AVA'DARA NAGANANDINI. SOLDIER OF THE SHI'AR IMPERIUM. ROYAL WARBIRD, DEATHBRINGER CLASS.
AND I WAS BORN TO SERVE.

MONTHS AGO.
THE SKY SLUMS OF CHANDILAR.
THE SHI'AR THRONEWORLD.
WARBIRD DELTA, ANYTHING YET?
MY OLD HOME. I GREW UP IN THESE HIGH-SHANTIES.
STICK TO THE FLAMING MISSION OR YOU'LL DIE THERE TOO. YOUR TARGET SHOULD BE ALMOST IN SIGHT.
CRASH

WARBIRD DELTA TO CONTROL. I BELIEVE I FOUND OUR TERRORIST CELL. TELL THE TORTURE PRIESTS THEIR INTELLIGENCE WAS SPOT ON AS USUAL. REQUESTING PERMISSION TO ENGAGE.
PERMISSION GRANTED. DON'T FORGET TO READ THEM THEIR RIGHTS.
IN THE NAME OF THE IMPERIUM, YOU ALL HAVE THE RIGHT TO DIE!
I AM A WARBIRD, A SOLDIER OF THE SHI'AR. MY JOB IS TO KILL.
I HAVE BEEN DOING IT SINCE THE DAY I WAS BORN.
I CAME INTO THE WORLD 22 SEASONS AGO, IN A BREEDMART WAREHOUSE IN CHANDILAR'S FLESH BAZAAR DISTRICT.
MY FATHER WAS AN AUTOMATED SEED SPRINKLER. MY MOTHER, ONE OF THOUSANDS OF FROZEN EGGS HARVESTED EACH MONTH FROM FEMALE FACTORY WORKERS AS PART OF THEIR GOVERNMENT-MANDATED BODY-TAXES.
I GESTATED IN A SLAVEWOMB, IN THE BELLY OF AN ALIEN BROUGHT IN CHAINS FROM SOME CONQUERED WORLD OR ANOTHER, AN ALIEN WHOSE BODY WAS NOT DESIGNED FOR BIRTHING SHI'AR BABIES. SO WHEN I WAS BORN, IT WAS IN A RUSH OF BLOOD AND ALIEN DEATH SCREAMS.
BY THE TIME I DREW MY FIRST BREATH, I'D ALREADY CLAIMED MY FIRST KILL FOR THE IMPERIUM.

I WAS NAMED FOR THE MUNITIONS COMPANY THAT PURCHASED MY LIFE RIGHTS. ONCE I WAS OLD ENOUGH TO STAND, I WAS WORKING DAY AND NIGHT IN THEIR WAR FACTORIES.
I LEARNED TO ASSEMBLE AN ENTIRE PULSE CANNON BEFORE I LEARNED TO TALK. MY FIRST WORD WAS "RECOILLESS."
I LIVED IN THE SKY SLUMS WHERE THERE WAS BARELY ENOUGH AIR TO GO AROUND, LET ALONE FOOD.
THE OTHER CHILDREN DREAMED OF EARNING THE RIGHT TO SOMEDAY WALK UPON THE SACRED SURFACE OF THE THRONEWORLD ALONGSIDE THE WEALTHY AND THE GROUND-BORN ELITE.
BUT I NEVER DID.
AAAAH!
WHILE THE OTHER KIDS WERE PLAYING WITH THEIR TOY TORTURE KITS AND ALIEN EVISCERATION FIGURINES AND DREAMING OF BEING IMPERIAL SOLDIERS, I WAS OFF BY MYSELF...
DOING TERRIBLE THINGS.
MUCH TO MY SHAME...
I WAS A DEEPLY TROUBLED CHILD.
ANYONE WHO CAN HEAR MY VOICE! PREPARE TO ANSWER FOR YOUR SINS!

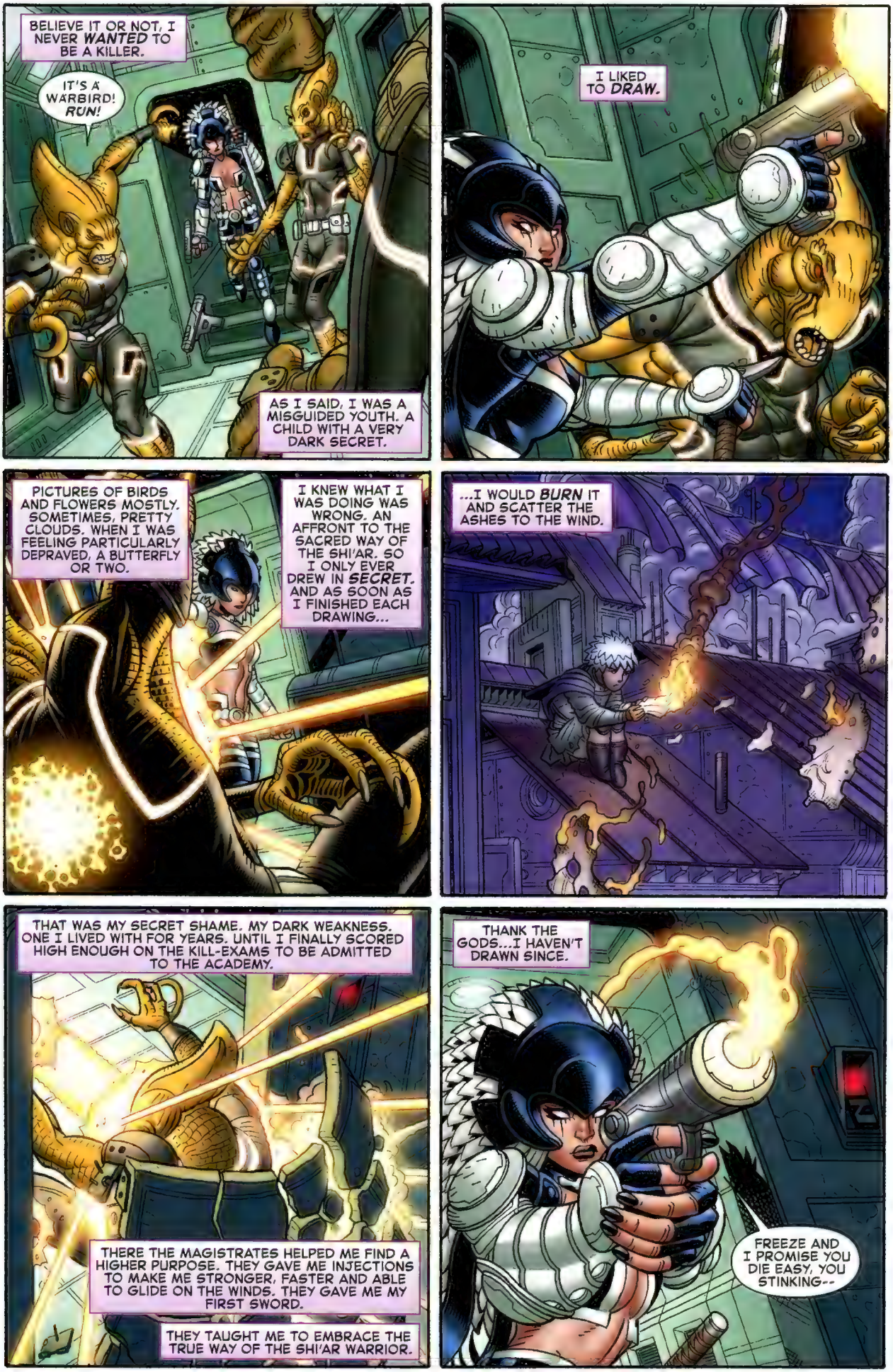
"I TOLD YOU TO STAND ASIDE. YOU SHOULD HAVE LISTENED."
UM. YOU DIDN'T GIVE ME MUCH OF A CHANCE. A LITTLE MORE OF A HEADS-UP WOULD'VE BEEN NICE.
NO PUN INTENDED.
I THINK.
MY APOLOGIES, MAN OF ICE.
YOU ARE A VALIANT WARRIOR, ESPECIALLY FOR AN EARTHMAN.
I DO NOT FAULT YOU FOR STANDING ALONGSIDE YOUR BRETHREN, EVEN THOUGH IT COULD VERY WELL MEAN THE DESTRUCTION OF THIS WORLD.
WAIT, PUT ME DOWN... WHAT ARE YOU...
IF YOU ARE ABLE TO PULL YOURSELF BACK TOGETHER, KNOW THAT I WILL STILL TAKE YOU INTO MY BED ONCE THIS IS OVER.
BUT THERE IS NO TIME FOR LOVE NOW.
WELL THAT'S A RELIEF.
LORD KUBARK! YOUR RESCUE HAS ARRIVED!



RRRAAGGGG!

STAND DOWN, GLADIATOR!

THE X-MEN HAVE ALWAYS BEEN ALLIES WITH THE SHI'AR. THAT NEED NOT CHANGE NOW.
THE PHOENIX HAS NO ALLIES, EXCEPT DEATH AND DESTRUCTION! RENOUNCE ITS POWER, SUMMERS, OR I WILL RIP IT FROM YOUR SHATTERED BONES!
NOT LIKELY, OLD FRIEND.
LORD KUBARK! AT LAST!
QUICKLY, COME WITH ME.
NO.
I HAVE ORDERS FROM THE EMPEROR HIMSELF TO GET YOU TO SAFETY.
YOU MEAN MY FATHER, AND THAT'S EXACTLY WHY WE'RE NOT LEAVING.
"NOT UNTIL WE HELP HIM."


BELIEVE IT OR NOT, I NEVER *WANTED* TO BE A KILLER.
IT'S A WARBIRD! *RUN!*
AS I SAID, I WAS A MISGUIDED YOUTH. A CHILD WITH A VERY DARK SECRET.
I LIKED TO *DRAW.*
PICTURES OF BIRDS AND FLOWERS MOSTLY. SOMETIMES, PRETTY CLOUDS. WHEN I WAS FEELING PARTICULARLY DEPRAVED, A BUTTERFLY OR TWO.
I KNEW WHAT I WAS DOING WAS WRONG. AN AFFRONT TO THE SACRED WAY OF THE SHI'AR. SO I ONLY EVER DREW IN *SECRET.* AND AS SOON AS I FINISHED EACH DRAWING...
...I WOULD *BURN* IT AND SCATTER THE ASHES TO THE WIND.
THAT WAS MY SECRET SHAME. MY DARK WEAKNESS. ONE I LIVED WITH FOR YEARS. UNTIL I FINALLY SCORED HIGH ENOUGH ON THE KILL-EXAMS TO BE ADMITTED TO THE ACADEMY.
THERE THE MAGISTRATES HELPED ME FIND A HIGHER PURPOSE. THEY GAVE ME INJECTIONS TO MAKE ME STRONGER, FASTER AND ABLE TO GLIDE ON THE WINDS. THEY GAVE ME MY FIRST SWORD.
THEY TAUGHT ME TO EMBRACE THE TRUE WAY OF THE SHI'AR WARRIOR.
THANK THE GODS...I HAVEN'T DRAWN SINCE.
FREEZE AND I PROMISE YOU DIE EASY, YOU STINKING--

WARBIRD DELTA, HAVE ALL ROOMS BEEN CLEARED AND ALL SEDITIONISTS NEUTRALIZED?
UM...
WARBIRD DELTA?
IT'S OKAY.
MY MOTHER TOLD ME THIS WOULD HAPPEN SOMEDAY.
I'M NOT AFRAID.

GGGRGH
KRAK
I'VE SEEN HIS PUNCHES CRACK MOONS. FELT HIS EYEBEAMS BURN HOTTER THAN THE SUN. I'VE SEEN HIM TEAR APART A BLACK HOLE WITH HIS BARE HANDS. BUT LOOK AT HIM NOW...
HE'S GOING TO LOSE.
UNLESS WE HELP HIM. IF YOU'RE TOO MUCH OF A COWARD, JUST DON'T GET IN MY WAY.
YOUR FATHER GAVE ME AN ORDER. AND A WARBIRD...
A WARBIRD ALWAYS FOLLOWS ORDERS.

GO. ANYWHERE BUT HERE.
BUT WHAT ABOUT MY DRAWINGS?
THERE WASN'T TIME FOR THAT. JUST GO.

GUUH
LATER THAT NIGHT, I CONFESSED MY SINS TO THE MAGISTRATES. I TOLD THEM ABOUT THE CHILD. THOUGH I WOULD NOT REVEAL WHERE I LEFT HIM.
THEY WERE *FURIOUS* OF COURSE. I WAS VERY NEARLY EXECUTED FOR THE OFFENSE.
BUT IN ALL THINGS, THE SHI'AR REFUSE TO FAIL. THEY VOWED TO REDOUBLE MY TRAINING. IF I WAS BEING CRIPPLED BY MY SYMPATHY FOR CHILDREN, THEN THEY WOULD FIND A WAY TO MAKE ME SUFFICIENTLY *HATE* THEM.
THAT'S WHEN THEY GAVE ME MY NEW ASSIGNMENT...
...AS BODYGUARD TO *KID GLADIATOR.*
OUT OF MY WAY, YOU SNIVELING FEATHER-HAIRED HARPY! SO COMMANDS YOUR *ROYAL MASTER!*

DON'T DO THIS, MY LORD. DON'T MAKE ME HURT YOU.
HURT ME? YOU IDIOT WOMAN! I WILL BREAK YOU INTO--
GUH
THE ALIEN BOY FROM THE SKY SLUMS DIDN'T MAKE IT FAR.
THREE DAYS AFTER I LEFT HIM IN THE GARDEN, HE WAS PICKED UP FOR STEALING FOOD FROM A RICH MAN'S DOG. LAST I HEARD, HE'D BEEN SENT TO WORK ON A STAR MINING STATION IN A DISTANT DYING GALAXY.
FOR ALL I KNOW, HE'S DEAD BY NOW. STAR MINERS DON'T EXACTLY HAVE LENGTHY LIFESPANS. BUT IN MY MIND HE'S STILL OUT THERE. STILL SURVIVING. AND SOMETIMES...

...STILL DRAWING.
NOOOOOO!!
THE DAY I SAVED THE BOY WAS THE LAST TIME I EVER GAVE IN TO MY WEAKNESS.
I FOUND A YELLOWED LEAF OF TREE HIDE AND A LUMP OF CHAR AND I TRIED TO THINK OF SOMETHING I USED TO LIKE TO DRAW. SOME FLOWERS. A PRETTY BIRD. A HAPPY CHILD.
BUT AS I SAT THERE, STARING AT A BLANK PAGE, WAITING FOR MY FINGERS TO MOVE, I SUDDENLY REALIZED...

...I'D FORGOTTEN HOW.
HOURS LATER.
OH MY GOD.
READY THE MEDICAL BAY. DO IT NOW.
MY NAME IS AVA'DARA NAGANANDINI. SOLDIER OF THE SHI'AR IMPERIUM. ROYAL WARBIRD, DEATHBRINGER CLASS.
I KNOW THE WAY OF THE SHI'AR. I KNOW HOW TO KILL. HOW TO DIE IF NEED BE.
I JUST WISH...

I WISH I KNEW HOW TO *LIVE.*

NEXT ISSUE

AARON / MOLINA

07 / 25 / 12

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